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SUBJECT Senator Dodd Interview

GEORGE HERMAN: Senator Dodd, you're one of the Foreign Relations Committee's leading experts on Central America. Let me ask you this: What is the Reagan Administration trying to do in Nicaragua? What is its ultimate aim? And is it breaking the law trying to do it?

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER DODD: Well, let me take the second part first. I think they clearly are breaking the law, the Bolden Amendment, as adopted in the continuing resolution last fall, clearly and explicitly prohibits the kind of activities that the Reagan Administration is engaged in in Nicaragua and in Honduras. Clearly, the Administration, beginning at the Republican convention, if you will, in 1980, has as its central aim and goal in Central America the destabilization and the overthrow of the Sandinista government.

ANNOUNCER: From CBS News, Washington, a spontaneous and unrehearsed news interview on Face the Nation with Senator Christopher Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Senator Dodd will be questioned by CBS News State Department correspondent Bill McLaughlin; by Don Oberdorfer, diplomatic correspondent for the Washington Post; and by the moderator, CBS News correspondent George Herman.

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HERMAN: Senator Dodd, you say the Reagan Administration's goal in Nicaragua is to overthrow the government. The Administration, at least in off-the-record conversations, says that is not so, that its aim is simply to stop or hamper the flow

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of supplies through Nicaragua to the rebels in El Salvador.

SENATOR DODD: Well, first of all, it was interesting the other day before the Foreign Relations Committee, one of Secretary Enders' deputies appearing before the committee with regard to the question of how much arms are moving from Nicaragua to El Salvador, in open testimony, the Administration cannot quantify. They don't have any idea whether it's a very small amount or a moderate amount or a large amount. And yet, over and over and over again, words "substantial, "massive" are used to describe that assistance, when in fact the Administration, by its own account, has no idea what -- in fact, the last real cache of arms was several years ago that they discovered.

So there's a basic fallacy, based on the Administration's own testimony, as to the justification for the support of the guerrillas or insurgents in Honduras and in Nicaragua.

DON OBERDORFER: Senator, you say that the Administration is clearly breaking the law. And some of your colleagues on the Intelligence Committee, both in the Senate and the House, in a little less forceful terms, have suggested that perhaps they're breaking the law.

If you believe the Administration is breaking the law, what do you think that Congress will do about it? Do you think they'll do anything about it?

SENATOR DODD: I believe we will. It's always hard to predict, given the timing of things. But let me suggest two things.

One is, of course, that law runs out on September 30th of this year. So we're going to have to either reauthorize that language or do something similar to it. I offered an amendment, or offered the original amendment, which was then substituted by the Boland amendment. My amendment would have prohibited any funding by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Defense Department for any paramilitary group operating in Central America. I think that would have been tighter, for the simple reason that you could make an argument, as the Administration has done, that even though it is our policy -- not, as they've stated -- it is not our policy to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. The fact that we may be providing assistance to some group who has as its goal the determination to overthrow the Nicaraguan government could be perceived, in a very legalistic way, as a loophole. I would suggest that you tighten it right now, and I intend to offer that language. That's number one.

Number two, I don't normally like to see secret sessions of the Senate. But I think the events of Central America are reaching the point where I think it becomes extremely important that we have that kind of a session for the entire Senate so we can find out exactly what our government is doing, who we are supporting, how far we intend to go. And I would hope to make that suggestion this week.

BILL MCLAUGHLIN: Senator Dodd, your colleague Senator Moynihan, who's on the Intelligence Committee, has expressed his fears that we're breaking the law in Nicaragua. But he's also suggested that it's a bad law and that perhaps this country should change the law, because the Sandinista regime is not in the interests of U.S. policy.

SENATOR DODD: Well, the question is, how do you want to deal with that problem? Are we going to deal with it, as the Administration seems determined to do, in a military way or in a political way? I happen to believe that if you were to try and synthesize the Administration's policy with regard to Central America, it would come down to this: Get rid of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. They believe that if that could be achieved, then all the other problems in Central America would disappear.

You may recall back in early 1981 then-Secretary of State Haig said we must go to the source. He identified the source as being Cuba. I think since then the Administration has moderated that identification of source and it includes Nicaragua. They happen to believe that: Get rid of Nicaragua, get rid of the Sandinistas, rather, and you will solve all the problems; and do that in a military way. That has been, basically, what they've been doing since '81, the spring of '81.

I think that's fundamentally wrong. I don't think, one, that you're going to get rid of the problems of Central America by getting rid of the Sandinistas. The revolution in Guatemala and El Salvador predates the problems in Nicaragua.

And secondly, the inherent problems, the social, economic, political problems. The Administration refuses to recognize that those exist.

And for those two reasons, I think their approach -- that is, a military approach, supporting paramilitary groups to overthrow that government -- is just categorically wrong and is going to create far more problems in the months ahead.

MCLAUGHLIN: Well, then, what should our approach be, an approach that would succeed in keeping out Soviet influence in the area?

SENATOR DODD: Well, why don't we -- I think it would be so important if we were to listen to other voices in Nicaragua: Alfonse Rabella; Archbishop Obando y Bravo; for instance; the Chamorro family that ran La Prensa, the well-known newspaper there; spokespeople for the human rights groups, for instance. All have suggested that this Administration's policy of a military overthrow, if you will, of the Sandinistas is absolutely destructive of their efforts, which they perceived as somewhat successful in moderating the government of Nicaragua. I'm talking now about opposition groups inside Nicaragua, opposition to the Sandinistas.

MCLAUGHLIN: Senator, but what can opposition groups do in a regime that refuses to hold elections?

SENATOR DODD: Well, first of all, I'm not going to defend the Sandinistas. They've done some things that run directly contrary to their revolutionary effort. But it seems to me there's a far greater chance of success by pursuing that course than it is to support the old Somoza National Guard troops.

People in Nicaragua are obviously not happy with the Sandinistas. If there's one thing they fear more than the Sandinistas, however, it's a return of the old Somoza forces. And by the United States supporting the National Guard forces under the Somoza regime, we're clearly allying ourselves with repressive forces that they lost -- the Nicaraguans lost a lot of blood in trying to and successfully removing from their country.

HERMAN: But history does not have a very good record of moderate elements gaining control in a communist-led, communist-inspired government.

SENATOR DODD: Well, I think it's early enough...

HERMAN: The whole path of history is the opposite direction entirely.

SENATOR DODD: Well, in fact, it's early enough in Nicaragua, I believe. You don't have any clear single leader. You have a junta together. It's in a very unstable state at this point. The private sector is needed. The other influences that are still in Nicaragua are prominent individuals. The church is very strong in Nicaragua, still.

I'm not suggesting that that course will work. I'm just suggesting to you that it's a better course to follow than the one which supports paramilitary groups that we're not necessarily going to follow through with in a military takeover. It violates all the treaties, by the way, the Rio Treaty and the OAS Charter, which we're signatories to, clearly violates non-intervention.

Now, if we want to follow what the Cubans and the Soviets are doing in a Poland or in an Afghanistan, I don't want to use that as our model, quite frankly. I think we ought to follow the law. I think we ought to encourage moderate elements. We ought to be supportive of them. We can provide assistance to them without having to go through government sources. That, with all of its risks and all of the problems associated with it, is, to me, a far better course to follow than another Bay of Pigs, in effect, in Nicaragua.

HERMAN: Should we put pressure on economically? Should we cut the sugar quota from Nicaragua? Should we make it difficult for the government to continue?

SENATOR DODD: I think those are certainly better options than support of a paramilitary group. I would also suggest that we might have tried a different approach in Nicaragua, and that is to offer some assistance and to try and build a working relationship with that government. I think by writing it off, as this Administration did early on -- and they did write it off -- they virtually forced Nicaraguans, moderate elements particularly, to follow one path. They could not make an argument internally in Nicaragua that there were alternatives that the government should follow, in terms of support either from the Cubans or from the United States. We eliminated that option for them.

OBERDORFER: I'd like to go back a little bit to the secret war. You say, clearly, the government is violating the law. How do you know that the United States Government is violating the law, that it's supporting a secret war down there in Nicaragua?

SENATOR DODD: Well, you can only listen to the interviews of the insurgents, themselves. They claim they're getting assistance and training from the United States. The Boland Amendment clearly prohibits even advisers, counseling. The words clearly cover that situation.

Now, you can -- the reports of others who have been there. I'm not revealing information from any secret sessions. There's enough public information, including the testimony of the recipients of that aid, that in fact they're getting support from the United States.

OBERDORFER: Well, then let me go on to the next part of it. If the United States is doing this, the question is: What may it lead to? Yesterday, or in the past several days, sometime, the Defense Minister of Nicaragua, Humberto Ortega, gave an interview in which he said that if this war continues, supported through Honduras, that Honduran revolutionaries, as he

term them, may start attacking the Honduran military within Honduras.

If that happens, or if Nicaragua attacks Honduras, its base camps that are supporting this war, what will the United States do, and what would the United States Congress do as these events continue down the road?

SENATOR DODD: Well, that's the \$64,000 question, and one of the reasons why I oppose the support of these paramilitary groups, because I think that's a very legitimate question to ask: What would we do? And I don't think the Administration has asked itself that question.

I frankly don't think Congress, given the general mood and the concerns about Central America, would be willing to support, certainly, the injection of U.S. troops into Central America, even in Honduras, were that situation to arise.

The Administration, I think, would probably then try to create a scenario where we had to intervene militarily, using U.S. forces because an ally was under attack. And that's exactly the kind of scenario that I think becomes more feasible and more likely, if you will, with the pursuance of the present Administration policy. We're going to inflame that entire region.

OBERDORFER: When you say "create a scenario," I mean I don't quite -- those are interesting words, but do you mean they would deliberately try to get us into a war down there?

SENATOR DODD: I think they're certainly, indirectly, creating that situation. The Nicaraguans are going to look terribly justified. For instance, their arguments of building up a huge military machine. A lot of people outside of the United States were highly critical of that effort. Now they look legitimate. They're under attack. They've got guerrillas in the South and guerrillas in the North. They could go, I presume, before international forums and say, "Look. We have to deal with a threat. What nation would not deal with that threat?"

HERMAN: Senator Dodd, it's all very well for you to sit there and say that the Administration is violating a law. It's a law that Congress passed. What can Congress do? What will Congress do about what you claim is a violation of congressional law?

SENATOR DODD: Well, one, I presume we're going to have to either reauthorize it or tighten it up, as I mentioned earlier. Clearly, I'm sure, the Administration is going to make the argument that this is designed, if they're willing to admit

even that, to cut off this massive supply of arms that's coming from Nicaragua to El Salvador which -- I mentioned a moment ago the Administration, in its own testimony, said...

HERMAN: Congressional action. Let me get back to the congressional action.

SENATOR DODD: There, I think, we'll tighten up the law. And we may, in fact, even go further in terms of cutting off military assistance to El Salvador, or threaten to do it. Certainly in Honduras, we may decide to moderate the request from that country if the Administration doesn't back away from what everyone knows is their present policy.

MCLAUGHLIN: Senator, what about the Soviet connection? There's a report in today's New York Times that the Soviet Union is considering putting intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Nicaragua if we deploy Pershing and cruise in Western Europe. The Soviets have said that sort of thing before, they've had the threat of a new deployment.

What should our reaction be if that does happen?

SENATOR DODD: Well, of course, it would be a -- I saw the same quote, and it was sort of floated out. There was no -- it wasn't an exact commitment to do it. Obviously, it would escalate the situation far beyond what any of us are imagining. To all of a sudden be confronted with Soviet strategic missiles in our own hemisphere would be in clear violation of understandings that were reached two decades ago. And clearly, it should be -- I'm sure this President or any President would make it clear that if the Soviets were to do that, that would bring us right to the brink, in terms of confrontation, again.

MCLAUGHLIN: But are we seeing a growing Soviet influence, and are, in fact, our policies encouraging it?

SENATOR DODD: Well -- in terms of Central America, you're talking about.

MCLAUGHLIN: Yes.

SENATOR DODD: Well, I think we are. I think that we've defined Central America as a confrontation between East and West. This is how it has been characterized for the past two years. Again, I think that confuses cause and effect. The Administration believes that if Fidel Castro and the Soviets were not around, there wouldn't be any problems in Central America. I happen to believe, and I think most of our allies do in the region, that it's been the absence of economic, political and social reforms in those countries that have created the

situation. Castro and the Soviets may be taking advantage of it, and I think they are, but they didn't create the situation. And it's that basic misunderstanding that I think has led the Administration to the policies it's been pursuing.

If we can get them away from that thinking and have them understand that these are indigenous problems and they've got to be dealt with through the reform mechanism, the political process, then I think we can minimize the kind of rhetoric we're getting even out of the Soviet Union, suggesting that they'd even place missiles in Nicaragua. We've got to lower that debate, to move away from that East-West confrontation, that, in fact, El Salvador is the great confrontation between East and West. I think the rhetoric is making it so.

HERMAN: Senator Dodd, let me break you out of the Central American problem and switch you all the way across the world. Just before we came to the studio, the government of Jordan said King Hussein would not take part in any peace talks with Israel, either on Jordan's behalf or on anyone else's. Presumably meaning, quite deliberately, the Palestinians. What does that do to President Reagan's entire Middle Eastern peace plan?

SENATOR DODD: Well, it's a question we'll have to look at a bit more carefully the next several days to determine why and whether or not this is an absolute refusal or whether or not there's some conditionality associated with that refusal. So I'd want to be cautious about suggesting what this means definitively.

But clearly, if in fact it is that, I think it pretty much scuttles the Reagan peace proposal. It's so vitally important that Hussein be involved, that Jordan be involved in settling the West Bank-Gaza problem that without his participation, I don't know how we can anticipate moving forward, unless, of course, Arafat or the PLO were to turn around and decide tomorrow that they will recognize the right of Israel to exist. Then you might create a whole new scenario. That is very unlikely.

So, at this point, I would guess, if in fact they're out -- that is, Hussein is out for the indefinite future -- then the Reagan peace proposal is going to have to be rethought.

OBERDORFER: Do you think that the Administration failed to pursue the President's peace proposal sufficiently? Was there a lack of energy on the part of the Administration in pushing it forward enough, or did they lack something in their approach?

SENATOR DODD: I think it was more the approach. I

think too much of an effort was made to link the events in Lebanon with a determination to resolve the West Bank and Gaza issue. It was a nice idea, but I think trying to, in effect, deal with both of those problems simultaneously meant there would not be enough attention on the latter -- that is, on the West Bank-Gaza situation.

OBERDORFER: Well, with the troops in Lebanon, with the Israeli troops, it seems to me they didn't have much choice. They had to deal with that, surely.

SENATOR DODD: Clearly.

OBERDORFER: And Hussein wasn't going to join up if that problem wasn't dealt with. So, would you think they should have just postponed any approach...

SENATOR DODD: I would have held off a while rather than absolutely insisting upon an answer on this one while we're also dealing with the Lebanese situation. I would have delayed a little bit. I realize that that would have made problems -- or made them a bit more difficult to grope with, in terms of the future. But it seemed to me trying to do both simultaneously, trying to create that linkage made the likelihood of getting a resolution of the West Bank and Gaza problem less likely as a result of that.

MCLAUGHLIN: Senator, the Israelis have complained that all the pressure in the Middle East has been put on them by the United States, no American pressure on the Arabs. Do you think that's a fair complaint?

SENATOR DODD: I think fairly so. I mean, you know, in Lebanon you have a number of -- it isn't just the Israelis who are there. The Syrians are there as well. And to suggest that, as the Administration has, that by Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon that things could move along rapidly, I think that's a mischaracterization of the problem.

I would certainly like to see the Israelis withdraw and to give the Lebanese a chance to fashion their government. But to suggest that, as the Administration has by delaying delivery of the F-16s, that this is going to provoke some movement on the part of the Israelis, I think is a poor way to treat an ally. It's like the pop clutch. I mean we don't seem to be consistent in our dealings with them, to delay delivery, to put that kind of pressure on when there are other elements involved, I think, lacks a sense of balance and fairness.

HERMAN: Is the whole Middle Eastern peace idea falling apart? I call you attention to the fact that a moderate

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Palestinian, a moderate PLO leader was assassinated today by a rebel -- well, I don't want to call it a rebel, but an extremist Palestinian and Arab group, who said this is revenge on behalf of all Arabs for this moderation.

SENATOR DODD: Yeah. I believe that the individual assassinated had repeatedly called for dialogue and negotiations, and so forth.

HERMAN: Are the extremists in the saddle? Are things going steadily downhill for peace in the Middle East?

SENATOR DODD: Well, it would appear that way. I don't know the reason why Arafat did not -- I frankly anticipated that Yasser Arafat would give King Hussein the signal to go forward. I was sort of surprised that he didn't, quite honestly. And it may be a reflection of a polarization, again, of the elements there in the Middle East and extremists having a more dominant position than they appeared to have over the past several months. It would appear that way. Hussein, obviously, is not going to participate without support and approval from the PLO.

MCLAUGHLIN: If the Reagan plan is dead, and it sure does look dead this morning, what should be our new approach? We must have one, apparently.

SENATOR DODD: Well, that's why I'd like to see what the rationale was, why King Hussein would not go forward. It may be that there were a number of things that he would have liked to secure first. And if that's the case, we'd have to analyze them.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you agree with the Administration, Senator, that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are a major obstacle to peace?

SENATOR DODD: I think they are an obstacle. And that's been a problem all the way along. I think they would become far less an obstacle if King Hussein had decided to participate. I don't think we would have needed to exercise leverage or pressure on Menachem Begin to reverse that policy. I think had King Hussein decided to participate in those negotiations, the West Bank settlement issue would have evaporated.

Now that -- I believe, at least, based on the information we have -- that the Reagan peace proposal appears dead this morning, then I think it's going to be extremely difficult to get the Begin Administration to change that policy.

OBERDORFER: Why would the settlements problem evaporate? Because it seems to me that the Begin government has made it very clear they're going ahead with those settlements, no matter what.

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SENATOR DODD: I think had Hussein joined that peace process, I think you would have seen a substantial change. I think the internal pressure inside Israel would have been so significant on the West Bank settlement issue that it would have -- I say evaporate. There are many there already. They're not going to destroy them overnight. But in terms of continuing or building new ones, I think that would have stopped, without any question. And I agree it has been an obstacle.

HERMAN: Let me take you down a quick shopping list of a couple of other items. Is the nomination of Mr. Adelman dead?

SENATOR DODD: Deep, deep trouble. I saw a vote count that shows it dead even.

HERMAN: So it's still a possibility.

SENATOR DODD: Very much a possibility that he'll either be rejected -- if he is, it's going to be a narrow, narrow vote.

HERMAN: Go down my list one further. The MX missile, which President Reagan wants to put in the Minuteman silos to replace what the Administration calls our aging missiles, the Minuteman and Titan, and so forth. Will it be voted in?

SENATOR DODD: That has a greater chance of success than what was being proposed earlier. I would think it might get by. That new basing mode is going to have more votes, more support than certainly any suggestions that have been made earlier.

HERMAN: And one further one in my list. Has the Administration, as Don Oberdorfer put it to me before we went on the air, has it thrown away the China card by poor policy towards China?

SENATOR DODD: Not necessarily. I think it's a question where you could expect these kinds of confrontations to occur between the People's Republic of China and ourselves -- that is, over this recent case of the defection. My hope would have been that the Administration would have worked with the Chinese more closely rather than let it stretch out over seven months. That was too long a period of time.

And I'd also suggest that if we're going to be consistent in these policies, that we're going to have to apply those same standards around the globe, and we haven't done that.

So, I don't see the relations falling apart over this, at all. There's going to be a period of strain.

HERMAN: Declining?

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SENATOR DODD: Decline a little bit. I think it comes back. There are too many of the larger issues that are important to the Chinese. They're not going to allow those to go down the drain over this single case. I don't believe they're that foolish.

HERMAN: Okay. Thank you very much, Senator Dodd, for being our guest today on Face the Nation.